DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 368 PS 019 493

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TITLE Pupils as Partners: Site-Based Management in Elementary Classrooms.
PUB DATE 16 Mar 91
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (46th, San Francisco, CA, March 16, 1991).
AVAILABLE FROM Michael B. Murphy, Washtenaw County Human Services, Community Mental Health Division, 555 Towner, P.O. Box 915, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 ($1.00).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; Cooperation; Discipline; Elementary Education; Elementary School Curriculum; *Elementary School Students; *Elementary School Teachers; Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; Student Evaluation; *Student Improvement; Student Participation; Student Role; Teacher Role; *Teamwork

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a shared leadership, quality improvement team approach to classroom management in elementary school classrooms that is similar to the quality and school improvement approaches which are increasingly available to school personnel and community leaders. Contents outline a model approach to cooperative classroom management among teachers and students. Issues regarding implementation are discussed, and some outcomes of research are briefly reviewed. Benefits to classrooms implementing the model include increased student motivation and participation in class activities, increased student ability to solve typical interpersonal problems, improved student work habits, and increased student cooperation. The Classroom Cooperation Circle involves the training of students and brief class meetings held daily. In spite of the time investment required for these activities, the Cooperation Circle has been found to buy back time formerly spent disciplining children and enforcing a host of teacher-made rules and decisions. (RH)

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Pupils as Partners: Site-Based Management in Elementary Classrooms[1]

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ABSTRACT: *This paper describes a shared leadership "quality improvement team" approach to classroom management in elementary school classrooms, similar to the quality and school improvement approaches which are becoming increasingly available to school personnel and community leaders. This paper outlines a model approach to cooperative classroom management among teachers and their students, and issues of implementation are discussed. Some research outcomes are briefly reviewed. Classroom benefits include increased student motivation and participation in class activities, increased student ability to solve typical interpersonal problems, improved student work habits, and increased student cooperation among themselves as well as with classroom routines. Despite the need to train students and to hold brief class meetings each day, the "Classroom Cooperation Circle" has been found to buy back time formerly spent disciplining children and enforcing a host of teacher-made rules and decisions.*

INTRODUCTION

Because an appropriate classroom climate has been credibly identified as a key contributor to educational effectiveness (Edmonds & Fredericksen, 1979; Brookover et al.1979), during the last decade educators have put considerable energy and resources into seeking out and implementing novel approaches toward providing hygienic workplaces for elementary school children and their teachers. Additionally, the need for a "systems approach" to school improvement has been highlighted by two seminal publications — one from the National Commission for Excellence in Education (1983), and the other from the U.S. Department of Education (Kyle, 1985). These and similar publications have encouraged the nation's schools to seek strategies for "excellence" and "effectiveness" in education. In addition to improved school/classroom climate, increased participation of pupils and teaching staff in decision-making; cooperative teaching and learning strategies;

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[1] Paper presented at the 46th Annual Meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, San Francisco, March 16, 1991.

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and more positive teacher-pupil expectancies have also been identified as necessary milestones for reaching proposed excellence and effectiveness standards (Edmonds & Fredericksen, 1979; Lezotte *et. al.*, 1980, Anderson, 1982; Thompson, 1984).

Assuming that children can better achieve mastery of most concepts by working together instead of individually, a host of recent approaches to "cooperative learning" have been introduced (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). In addition, the fairly recent School Improvement movement has been blossoming across the educational landscape, with school districts adapting and implementing the kinds of participative management approaches which have proved to be effective in business and industry's "Quality" movement (Crosby,1989; Gabor, 1990; Juran, 1988; Walton, 1986). However, many selected strategies have proved to be temporary fads — enthusiastically embraced by some participants and ignored or criticized by others, soon to be abandoned or only partially implemented and poorly monitored across schools. A widespread failure to implement systematic, district-wide improvements in elementary classrooms' working climates can be attributed to a number of factors, (1) a district's history of unsystematic approaches to innovation, (2) a choice of insufficient technologies, (3) a lack of systematic, continuous administrative support, (4) impatience with the additive and necessarily slow pace of planned change and lasting improvement, (5) an emphasis on adult participation in school improvement planning — with a lack of similar frequent, predictable student/teacher cooperation activity in the classrooms, (6) insufficient teacher and student skills training in cooperative problem solving, (7) insufficient evaluation, monitoring, dissemination, and maintenance of approaches that work, and (8) misunderstandings regarding the various continuous improvement strategies that enhance participative problem solving.

The most serious deficit in many approaches to improving the classroom working climate is that many rely too heavily on the teacher's authority as disciplinarian and "boss" of the classroom — ignoring the modern management vision of cooperative worker/supervisor "quality improvement teams," which continuously meet in order to identify problems, develop likely solutions, test possibilities, evaluate action plans, and implement permanent changes in the way workers relate to one another and to their jobs. Although school improvement committees and task forces are becoming ubiquitous on the staff and community level, very rarely is an elementary classroom teacher supported and encouraged in joining forces with the student "workers" to cooperatively solve classroom management problems.

This paper describes the implemention of a "quality improvement team" approach within elementary classrooms, where the teacher regularly trains and configures a total class "Cooperation Circle," in order to identify problems or opportunities, to set goals, and

to generate, implement, evaluate, and refine plans for solving the identified problems and capitalizing on opportunities.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The approach described here has been field tested in numerous school districts in Michigan, Massachusetts and Florida. It involves a system of principles, practices, and methods which work together (1) to promote a basis for cooperative teaching and learning in classrooms and schools, (2) to extend participatory strategies for school improvement to the elementary classroom, (3) to improve children's competencies in dealing with others, as well as to improve their effectiveness in appropriately meeting their personal needs, and (4) to develop and maintain an orderly, effective school and classroom working climate.

The approach reported here utilizes *The Classroom Cooperation Curriculum*[3] (Schelkun,1991), a skill-building technology which relies heavily on a number of well-researched social competency training models targeted for school children within their classrooms. Other models for reaching similar goals have been reported favorably in the literature: Among these models are the Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving (ICPS) program (Shure & Spivack, 1982), the Social Problem-Solving (SPS) curriculum (Weissberg *et. al.*, 1981), the Improving Social Awareness/Social Problem Solving (ISA/SPS) curriculum (Elias *et. al.*, 1982), and various "Causal Learning" curricula (Ojemann, 1961). Additional concepts and activities have been adapted from (a) social research models (*e.g.* interviewing methods, survey techniques), (b) the adult learning model (*e.g.* brainstorming methods, task groups, interactive meeting format), (c) stress management training models, and (d) participative "Quality" management approaches developed by industry and adapted for school improvement uses.

USING THE CURRICULUM

In order to maintain predictability and control, skill-building curricula function as core training strategies for most quality and school improvement participatory problem-solving approaches used by adults. In like manner, elementary school teachers use curricula when preparing their students to function appropriately in their classroom

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[3] The final format of *The Classroom Cooperation Curriculum* is undergoing final revision and is expected to be available in August, 1991. Inquiries may be directed to the publisher, Human Networks, Inc., 3517 Terhune, Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

Cooperation Circles. These elementary classroom "quality circles" serve as brief classroom discussion meetings, during which teachers and children identify and solve typical problems which occur in school, and then work together to improve the children's classroom and school-wide interactions. The curriculum described here consists of five scripted units, containing 21+ lessons (a number of supplemental lessons being optional). Each lesson is designed to be taught in a number of 15 minute segments, over as many days as seem necessary:

Unit One: Getting Started: Children learn methods of communicating effectively in a classroom discussion, and become familiarized with the use of certain discussion aids (*e.g.*: timer, turns-taking token). They practice Cooperation Circle skills, and learn to distinguish between facts that can be seen or heard and those guesses and assumptions which require empathy and discussion. They develop and discuss a list of Common Values which are important in their community, homes, school, and classroom: These Common Values are used as a benchmark for decision making, when the Cooperation Circles consider alternative suggestions and their probable consequences.

Unit Two: Four Kinds of Control : The goal of this unit is to create a mutual understanding of issues surrounding the need for classroom discipline and other aspects of classroom management. Daily classroom interactions become more predictable, because teachers and their students reach a common understanding and agreement on concepts and guidelines for class behavior. Children review four ways in which people's behavior are influenced and structured: "Environmental control by arranging the setting," "Authoritarian control by following rules," "Social control by maintaining norms," and "Self control by exercising personal responsibility." These issues are illustrated by activities such as interviewing a "boss," demarking "personal space" on the floor, and "breathing slowly to calm down."

Unit Three: Four Main Feelings: Children learn that feelings are facts to be explored when dealing with opportunities and problems; they learn to understand ways in which feelings contribute motivation and energy toward thoughts and behaviors in situations which they are evaluating. They learn to observe body language and what people are saying, in order to assess the feelings which may be contributing to any situation. Four "Main Feelings"

(Happy, Upset, Calm, and Surprise) and physical responses are reviewed. The concepts of associated "other feelings" and "mixed feelings" are also taught and discussed.

Unit Four: PSP — People Solving Problems : The goal of this unit is to teach basic concepts and competencies which enable children to identify and solve the kinds of interpersonal problems that occur in the course of their school day. The first lessons serve as prototype "story problems," which introduce all the skills and concepts needed for problem-solving when using the PSP process. Each story problem can take several 15 minute Cooperation Circle sessions before being resolved; thus, the children learn patience, by postponing closure when dealing with a complex problem or opportunity. After practicing with a number of typical school-based problems, the class uses the Cooperation Circle process to solve its own classroom problems.

Unit Five: Negotiation: As an extension of Cooperation Circle activity, students learn the process of negotiation. They learn to develop and present proposals effectively. As with PSP, they practice negotiating with typical scenarios, so that they are better equipped to negotiate realistically and effectively with one another and with adults, in their daily lives.

IMPLEMENTATION

Many useful lessons have been learned as a result of implementing Cooperation Circles in a wide variety of elementary schools. The experiences of the authors in the *Quality of School Life* program may offer useful information for school districts which may consider implementing similar programs. An appropriate curriculum must be selected and its initial implementation must be planned thoughtfully, logically, and with a great deal of respect for the norms and constraints of the schools. It involves a number of steps: identifying pilot schools; orienting the district's legitimizers; assuring resources — such as adequate resources and teacher training time; implementing a demonstration pilot program; approaching key personnel for support; presenting the program's goals and methods to staff; identifying interested teachers; training teachers; distributing curricula and materials; consulting with participating teachers, when necessary, in order to ensure appropriate implementation; collecting and analyzing evaluation data during the pilot phase; and

following through with a natural dispersion of the program, upon completion of the demonstration phase.

Because the support of school administrators is critical to the success of any systems intervention in schools, the authors have placed a great deal of emphasis on developing rapport and trust with all levels of school administrative staff and with bargaining unit representatives. Orientation of central and building administrators and other recognized school leadership personnel has led to their understanding and support for the program's goals and methods. In addition, they have become the program's primary communicators to other school leaders. Once a building administrator expressed support, a meeting is held to introduce the program to interested staff. A brief description of the history, goals, structure, and methods of the selected curriculum is provided. Volunteer teachers are signed up for in-depth training. At the subsequent training sessions, the curriculum is reviewed carefully, with illustrative descriptions and anecdotes. A videotape may be shown or a Circle session may be simulated, in order to provide a visual image of the teachers and students in action. Methodologies, such as participatory problem-solving and brainstorming, are modeled within the context of the training sessions (*e.g.*, teachers "delegated" responsibility for refreshments and "brainstormed" goals for the training sessions.) The duration and timing of training varies with each group, depending upon the availability of participating teachers and their consultant/trainers. An average total time of 10 hours of teacher training has been found to be helpful.

Since the curriculum selected by the authors encourages approved photocopying of all materials, each of the newly-trained teachers participating in our program receives a grade-level curriculum, and a set of "trigger" flash cards. Depending on available resources of their district, they also buy, make, or are provided with a number of teaching aids: a packet of stimulus cartoons, a digital timer, several pads of lined newsprint, "feelings" posters, a "3 D's for Telling" poster, blank dry-erase "story-cards" for use on the PSP storyboard, a plastic turn-taking token, a roll of heavy twine for use with the "Personal Space" lesson, as well as sock puppets, for the K-2 curriculum.

During our demonstration phase, each consultant/trainer was assigned to assist a group of teachers throughout the year. Consultations took three forms: (1) classroom visitations, in which the consultant observed a Cooperation Circle in action and followed up with a discussion with the teacher; (2) individual teacher consultations, in which the consultant and teacher shared information and cooperatively solved implementation difficulties; and (3) consultant-modeled classroom sessions, during which the consultant demonstrated procedures, in order to help the class to experience unfamiliar methods. Participating teachers were aided in collecting data for evaluating the demonstration pilots

interventions in a manner that was the least disruptive to classroom procedures and the school curriculum.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROCESS AND OUTCOME

The Classroom Cooperation Curriculum has been evaluated in a variety of elementary classrooms. One innovative method for evaluation included coded analyses of videotapes of elementary classes solving a typical school-based problem. The pre-post videotaped assessments of group competencies and problem-solving abilities show promising results in several areas :

(1) Program classes were more efficient, using more systematic and sequential strategies when solving the specimen problem than the comparison classes.
(2) Program classes were significantly better able to identify a specific and relevant focus for a problem than were the comparison classes: they wasted less time and consistently stayed on task more than the comparison classes.
(3) Program groups provided more varied, effective solutions to a problem than the comparison classes, and were more likely to examine proposed solutions for likely consequences.
(4) Program classes were significantly better able to reach consensus on an appropriate "action plan," or solution of choice, than were the comparison classes, which often abandoned the task after considerable pointless discussion.

These results are reported in more detail elsewhere (Schelkun et. al., 1988). Generally, it was demonstrated that groups which participated in the Cooperation Circles held more focused discussions in solving typical school-related social problems than did comparisons. They were more likely to follow logical steps of fact-finding, problem-identification, goal-setting, generation of alternate solutions, consequential thinking, and consensual decision-making. They were more able to generate effective, non-redundant solutions to a main problem. They wasted less time repeating one another's ideas and getting "off track" by discussing irrelevant ideas. They were consequently better able to reach consensus on an appropriate action plan. Their planned solutions were more socially appropriate and the predicted consequences for the chosen solutions were more desirable. Learning the group problem solving process, in effect, freed the class to think creatively, yet productively, when faced with typical problem situations.

Harder to measure, but readily observable was the change in classroom management. Teachers reported surprising results in just the first few weeks of teaching the curriculum, which teaches positive classroom skills and concepts that can be implemented immediately. Students were described as behaving far more responsibly, and positive classroom norms developed rapidly — freeing the teacher from the role of disciplinarian much of the time. Fewer rules were needed, and most breakdowns in classroom procedure were readily resolved by calling a special meeting of the classroom's Cooperation Circle.

In following years, teachers reported less need to teach the full curriculum: They reported that they had learned as much as their students, and were able to teach the necessary concepts by combining or adapting the lessons to their own teaching styles. As a result, they reported that the process had enabled them to institute site-based management in their own classrooms, turning the class into an effective student/teacher team which was able to function at any time throughout the school day when plans were to be developed or when problems were to be solved.

DISCUSSION

Our research, and that of others, has empirically validated the usefulness of social competency/problem-solving training for individual elementary school children; equally persuasive in our program was the observational data regarding its benefits for students and teachers. Students reported their Cooperation Circle time to be a relevant, interesting and fun part of their school day, and they spontaneously shared anecdotes which indicate that learning the problem solving process helped them in their daily lives. Many times, when a problem arose, a student would request a Cooperation Circle session. This was particularly noticeable during daytime transitions: for example, students returning from recess on the playground would request a Cooperation Circle to deal with the problem of "hogging the ball." Cooperation Circles give students a legitimized and effective forum to work on problems and opportunities that are of immediate importance to them.

Another benefit for students was that the Cooperation Circles provided a method for dealing with "loaded" classroom issues — "distancing" issues, when necessary, by means of a fictional story. For each problem or opportunity, they developed a PSP "storyboard" consisting of a visual outline of the problem-solving sequence demonstrated by stick-figure cartoons; members of the class served as "consultants" to a boy or girl named Terry, the protagonist in the story. In some cases Terry represented a typical child their age in a likely situation. Other times Terry represented a nonspecific child in their class with an acknowledged problem. Problems were "distanced" by this process — thereby avoiding

the procedural and political pitfalls of children's disclosing private personal or family information. Children were consequently never scapegoated or placed on the "hotseat" in the Circle discussions, but were given a chance to solve problems calmly and effectively as a group.

Particularly helpful were the negotiation skills learned by the students and encouraged by the teachers: students resolved their differences with one another more peacefully and appropriately re-negotiated classroom privileges, consequences, and details of day-to-day procedures with their teachers. Often, they were able to discuss and solve problems they were having in the lunchroom or in specialty classes, such as physical education, music, or art. At times, the specialty teachers or other school personnel would join the Cooperation Circle to assist in solving the problems or in maximizing opportunities.

The process also seemed to be particularly helpful to students who did not excel during other, more traditional activities. Students who were frustrated with reading or troubled with arithmetic often found that they could excel in their Cooperation Circles. Sometimes they were observed to be among the most vocal and creative thinkers in the group. The curriculum discussed here has an advantage in that it uses multiple modes (auditory, graphic, practice, discussion) in teaching the problem-solving skills; thus students can be reached via the modes most suited to their own individual learning styles.

A major concern of teachers is *time*. Because teachers are under a great deal of pressure to teach a number of basic and supplementary subjects, their teaching day is very full. In fact, for the teachers who opted not to participate in Cooperation Circles training, time constraints were their primary rationale. Fortunately, those who did participate reported that, rather than encroaching further on their already tight teaching agendas, the Cooperation Circles actually bought them time. It did so in two ways. First, classes using the Cooperation Circles required significantly less teacher time in disciplining children and reminding them of expected behavior. Since an objective of the Circles is to encourage students to take responsibility for their classroom norms, peer reminders usually intervened to settle the situation when responsible norms were forgotten or flouted. Frequently, the teacher didn't have to get involved at all; if necessary, an issue could be deferred for Circle time, instead of interrupting academic work. Second, teachers who became comfortable in using the curriculum, found that there were many ways to incorporate Circle procedures into other parts of the class day. For example, after solving a storyboard problem, one teacher instructed students to use their own words to write the story from beginning to end, as a language skills assignment. A first grade teacher used the "Feelings as Motivation" unit to satisfy a requirement of her Social Studies curriculum. A fifth grade teacher simulated a summit level Cooperation Circle negotiation session with the U. S. President

and the leader of an adversarial nation, as a lesson on current events. Others used the "Who's the Boss" lesson as an opportunity to teach interviewing skills, encouraging the class to interview various parents, school administrators, or board members to discover the advantages and headaches associated with managing others' activities,

Another benefit was that the process introduced the use of new teaching aids. Consultants were pleased to find that participating classrooms used the Circle teaching aids throughout their day. Dry erase boards and newsprint provided ways to preserve important information for further attention on another day. The timer was used for "time-out," quiet work time, small group activities, and as a reminder of special activities. Teachers appreciated the help it gave them in setting time limits for segments of the class day or for settling down. Also, the "ASK ME? TELL ME" turn-taking token allowed for more effective class discussions in all areas of the curriculum; passed from child to child, it removed from teachers the stressful burden of calling on children constantly for responses.

Although the Cooperation Circle process had much to offer teachers and their students, it was not a comfortable model for all teachers. Initially, a small number of teachers who seemed accustomed to a more authoritarian teaching style had some difficulty adjusting to the participatory process. For them, the most difficult unit of the curriculum was Unit Two: Four Kinds of Control. These teachers were unsure about the classroom norming concepts and were unaccustomed to the notion of having students share responsibility for classroom functioning. Consultants found it important to spend more time guiding these teachers in the art of "holding back," and delaying the urge to come up with their own solutions to classroom problems. With practice, however, these teachers reported that they enjoyed their students' increased sense of responsibility, empathy, and motivation. They also discovered that the participatory model does not remove their authority as a teacher. In fact, their authority was clearer, because students understood the reasons why their rare authoritarian interventions were necessary and were able to focus on a few teacher-imposed limits, instead of long lists of rules.

Some other teachers who were accustomed to a relaxed, *laissez faire* approach to classroom management were initially uncomfortable with the structured lesson plans for classroom discussion. However, they discovered that there was considerable leeway to account for differences in teaching style — and were surprised to discover that the students were more comfortable with the more consistent approaches, saying that they perceived the teacher as being more fair, once options and consequences became more predictable.

Thus, the Cooperation Circle was found to be a relevant and effective approach for bringing site-based management to students and teachers in elementary classrooms. Starting with a structured curriculum aimed at improving social competency skills, it

enables motivated teachers to improve the climate in their classrooms through participatory problem-solving. Although teachers must invest some time in learning and teaching group problem solving methods, the payoff is clear: students learn important skills that can be continuously developed, nurtured, and applied. When a school-based demonstration proves itself, a school district's support personal and peer trainers can join in as consultants and trainers for additional administrators and teachers who wish to use this or a similar curriculum and who will be more willing to implement the new methods, once they are assured of professional backup when necessary.

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